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Pleasant *Up Close On Hope* program marred by ballet, hip-hop clash

BY BRYAN ROURKE
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE - You can't mix oil and water. But Festival Ballet Providence tried.

Last weekend's *Up Close On Hope* dance series, which continues this weekend, offered some elegance and athleticism in both contemporary and classical styles. However, the five-dance, 90-minute show will most be remembered for an ambitious attempt: merging ballet with hip-hop.

DANCE REVIEW

It didn't succeed, unable to overcome the basic incongruity of the dance forms.

"The Hardest, Part 1," choreographed by Lorraine Chapman, featured a collaboration between eight hip-hop artists from the Rhode Show troupe and six dancers from Festival. At times, they playfully mocked each other's movements. But mostly the groups coexisted in artistic conflict. It seemed like someone mistakenly booked two acts for the same stage at the same time. And no one was backing down.

A hip-hop beat pulsed. Rappers rapped. And a Bach piano concerto played — all at once.

Some dancers listened to one music; some the other. Integration proved elusive.

Overall, the others works in the show were generally pleasant.

The production began with the premiere of "Wedding Day in Trolldhaugen," choreographed by Piotr Ostalstov, a Festival dancer. This was the program's only dance to tell a story: a wedding, not surprisingly.

The piece involved 12 barefoot dancers, two of whom would become bride and groom, although everyone's attire was casual: the women wore unitards with loose skirts; the men wore khakis and solid-colored shirts.

The music, by Edward Grieg, was classical and generally cheerful, lending itself to a kind of contemporary waltz, where friends and family helped steer the bride and groom to each other.

The piece nicely ended as it started

— with everyone huddled together, facing away from the audience, as though returning to normal after getting some dancing and a wedding out of their systems.

"Mutable Air," a premiere by Mark Harootian, a Festival dancer, offered a fresh take on George Winston's piano music. The work, involving eight dancers — women in cream-and-black skirts and white tops, and the men in khakis and white tanktops — offered interesting linear formations and a pleasing flow of dancers exiting and entering the stage in a quiet delicacy and complexity of choreography that featured a few notable movements.

When dancer Ryan Nye executed turns with Marissa Gomer held to one of his hips, Jennifer Ricci managed to place herself on his other hip within the flow of the movement.

Also Ryan and Gleb Lyamenkoff performed a nice end-over-end lift of a gracefully relaxed Ricci.

For classical purists, Emily Bromberg and Andrew Skeels performed the 1890 "Bluebird Pas de Deux" choreographed by Marius Petipa and set to the music of Tchaikovsky. It's a technically and physically demanding formal work. Yet Bromberg was poised, pirouette after pirouette. And Skeels was composed through an exhausting series of flutter-kicking leaps.

The remaining work in the program, "Extremes," was choreographed by Mihailo Djuric, Festival's artistic director. The company performed it two years ago, but with different dancers. This time, it was performed by Leticia Guerrero and Alexander Akoulov, who crisply executed the choreography, which, as the title implies, alternates from gentle to aggressive. It's in keeping with the music by Barbara Kolb, which features a shrilly played flute.

Up Close On Hope is presented again Saturday at 7:30 p.m., and Sunday at 6 p.m., at Festival's studio, 825 Hope St., Providence. For tickets, \$30, call (401) 353-1129, or e-mail info@festivalballet.com.

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